

THE BEGINNING  
OF THINGS



# Here We Go Round

by  
*Evelyn Sharp*



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THE BEGINNING OF THINGS

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by EVELYN SHARP

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# Here We Go Round

THE STORY OF THE DANCE

*by*

EVELYN SHARP



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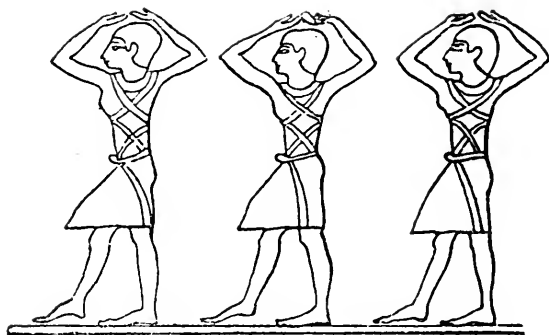


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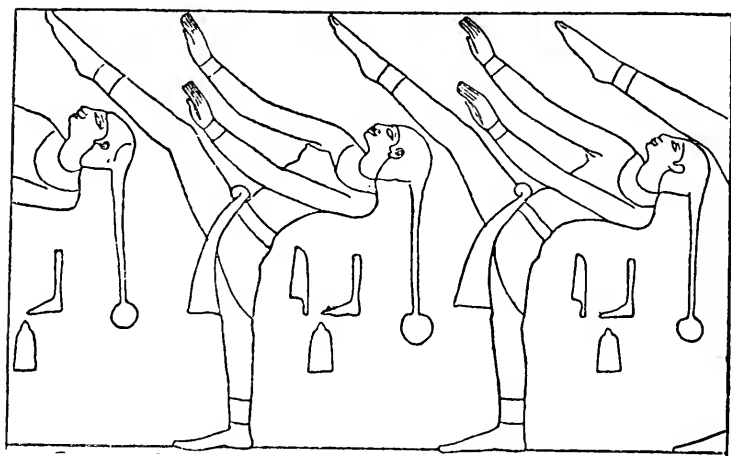
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- G. Maspero. *Dawn of Civilization.*
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- Sir E. K. Chambers. *The Medieval Stage.*
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*a*



*b*



*c*

- a* Egyptian man dancer (Thebes) wearing shoulder straps similar to the baldrick of the English morris dancer.
- b* Egyptian dancing girls (*cir.* 2900-2475 B.C.). See page 20.
- c* Egyptian dancing girls (*cir.* 2750-2625 B.C.). See page 22.

## CHAPTER I

### THE HORN DANCER

EVERY YEAR, on the Monday following the first Sunday after the fourteenth of September, a curious and beautiful little ceremony takes place in the small village of Abbot's Bromley in Staffordshire. At eight o'clock in the morning, a company of eleven men and one boy assembles at the church door. One is dressed as a woman, another as a Fool, a third masquerades as a hobby horse, his legs protruding below the trappings of the grotesque caricature of a beast ; two more act as musicians, playing respectively the accordion and the triangle. The six remaining men hoist on to their shoulders the heavy antlers that hang all the year round on the wall of the north aisle of the church ; and from the same sanctuary the man-woman, here called Maid Marian—the name a mediæval interpolation—takes down an ancient wooden ladle, a kind of deep cup at the end of a long stick, and the boy, a bow-and-arrow. Thus equipped, they start off with the vicar's blessing to perform the age-long ceremony of the Horn Dance.

All day long they skirt the boundaries of the rambling parish, a round of some fifteen miles in

all, stopping at one house after another in order to execute the serpentine movements of their dance, which takes them about five minutes to perform, with a sort of rhythmical walking step. Now and then they pause at the wayside or at cross roads; and when passers-by, on foot or on wheels, are arrested by the unusual spectacle of these antlered men, wearing a uniform costume—unfortunately not the traditional one, which has been lost—the dance is gone through again for the benefit of the strangers. Most impressive of all is the last part of this annual ceremony, when their day's round brings the dancers back again to the outskirts of Abbot's Bromley and they proceed by slow stages up the long village street, performing their dance at frequent intervals. All the inhabitants are now at their doors, sharing in the 'luck' of the dance by standing there to see it performed and then dropping a coin into Maid Marian's wooden cup. And so it goes on until nightfall, the same dance with the same evolutions and figures, over and over again, until it grows too dark to distinguish the dancers from one another. True to their impersonal character, they then seem to melt into the night; the people go indoors, and the horns and other properties are deposited in the church for another twelvemonth.

The Staffordshire Horn Dance is chosen as an introduction to this short survey of the origin of

dancing because it is one of the most suggestive of the ritual dances still surviving in our own country ; and it bears the marks of various old rites, beliefs and mysteries which surround that origin far back in the infancy of mankind. If it were possible to analyse exhaustively all the traditional features still discernible in the Horn Dance, tracing each one to its actual source, we should probably learn, not only all we want to know about the origin of dancing, but also much that we seek to know of the origin of man, the dancer. That is a story we shall probably never complete, although, generation by generation, research brings us an infinitesimal fraction nearer to our goal. But the adventure of trying to dance our way back over the centuries to the beginning of things is rendered both more possible and more alluring by the existence of folk survivals, such as the Staffordshire Horn Dance, in various parts of the world.

‘ It’s been in our family four hundred years, and so have the antlers ’, the leader of the Horn Dancers will tell you with pride, little realizing that, if this were all, his dance and his family would be comparative upstarts. For his pride in the exclusive ancestry of the dancers serves to remind us that the Indian Maruts, among the earliest speakers of our common Indo-European language and possibly the oldest sword dancers known, were also a band of youths especially chosen

and set apart as being all of the same parentage. And similarly, his claim in regard to the antiquity of the horns—apart from the fact that, if they are really reindeer's horns, as is believed, they are probably more than four centuries old—takes us back in suggestion much further still; for, as we shall see presently, primitive man also wore an animal mask when he danced at the dawn of the world in the palæolithic caves of Southern France.

But in addition to its betrayal of primitive elements, the Horn Dance has retained a seasonal character which brings it a step nearer than the days of palæolithic man. Occurring as it does near the period of the autumn solstice, which in this country coincides with the season of harvest, it suggests all sorts of old beliefs connected with the phenomena of Nature and the needs of man, some of which still survive among certain races of mankind. We cannot help wondering, for instance, if the antlers of the Horn Dancers may not be a clue leading us back to a time when possibly in that part of Britain, as still in New Guinea, India and elsewhere, the custom of treating an animal as a scapegoat for all the ills of a community was a yearly ceremony. Sir James Frazer, in *The Golden Bough*, gives examples to show that this custom commonly coincides with the beginning or end of winter in the temperate zone, and with seedtime

or harvest among agricultural peoples. Or the processional nature of the dance may point to its origin in another widespread folk custom, still persisting among the Gilyaks of Eastern Siberia for example, of parading round to all the inhabitants a sacred animal before it is sacrificed, so that every household may share in its beneficent qualities and receive its protection against evil spirits. A parallel to the possible survival of this animal rite which is suggested in the antlers of the Horn Dancers, is to be found in the custom prevailing until recently in the Highlands of Scotland, where, on the last day of the year, or Hogmanay as it is called, a man used to be dressed up in a cow's hide and taken from door to door to bring luck to the people and protection from witchcraft during the coming year.

Then, too, with what of the numerous forms of fertility, or more strictly life-preserving, ritual may not this curious dance be associated? The Bacchanals of ancient Thrace wore horns in imitation of their god Dionysus, who, whether in animal or in vegetable form, represented the life spirit to his worshippers; and the many ancient rites in which an animal was sacrificed and sometimes eaten sacramentally, with a view to stimulating life in all its forms and securing the welfare of the race, afford innumerable conjectures as to the particular folk ceremony of which we see the

remains in the Staffordshire Dance. But of course, as in all folk survivals, it is impossible to narrow down to one source what is obviously the product of a whole mass of traditions. Truly, if we knew everything there is to know about the Horn Dance, we should have to travel no farther afield in our search for the beginnings of all dancing.

In the search for origins a better bridge across the chasm of time can scarcely be built than stands ready-made to our hand in the story of the dance. Most elemental of all forms of self-expression, dancing has retained its primitive features more plainly than any other exercise of human skill and imagination that may equally have begun as a rite and ended as an art. Drawing, painting, literature, drama, music—all these may be said to have developed beyond resemblance to their primitive beginnings. But this is not true of the dance where it is still found existing traditionally, whether in isolated instances among the peasantry of the highly civilized societies of Europe, or in common use among races that retain their primitive culture, as in New Guinea or Australia. Even when the folk dance is danced as a revival, not semi-ritually by those to whom it has descended in uninterrupted sequence (as to the Horn Dancers or to the North of England sword dancers), the elemental nature of it still makes itself apparent—at all events to the dancer ; and modern men and



women who perform the folk dances of their own country in the highly sophisticated society of to-day bring themselves nearer to an understanding of their ancestors of the Stone Age than they would find possible through any other artistic medium. What separates them from that common ancestor of us all is not the dance itself, but its purpose. For it is certainly safe to conclude, amid much that is obscure and incapable of scientific proof, that whatever led prehistoric man to invent his first formal dance, it was not the desire for amusement or social distraction.

Of course, this theory must not be pushed too far. M. Jean Capart, discussing this very point in his book on *Primitive Art in Egypt*, is careful to say: 'There is no doubt that both music and dancing very rapidly acquired a pleasurable use in addition to their utilitarian and magical purposes.' He maintains that known examples of both in their primitive stage 'show that there is no doubt as to the magical character of these arts in their origin', but mentions also the impossibility of being always able 'to determine what is precisely the object of the musicians or dancers'. Dancing, rather more than music, lends itself to the creation of this uncertainty of purpose in the dancer's mind; for the dance is the easiest and most natural outlet for emotion of any kind, and may well have preceded speech in the various stages of man's evolution—

as both preceded drama. No one would assert with confidence—no modern folk dancer, at all events—that the early dance with a purpose did not incidentally cause enough pleasure to the dancer to induce him occasionally to perform it for its own sake, and when its performance was not necessitated by the emptiness of the tribal larder or the desire to please the spirit of an ancestor. It would be impossible to study what is left of the artistic achievements of primitive man and then to deny him even an occasional impulse to dance as a performer and not in propitiation of the bear he had just clubbed for his dinner, or in order to encourage more bears to come and be clubbed next week.

All this is and must remain conjecture, however, for we do not know at what point, if there ever was a definite point, dancing came to be regarded as an end in itself. Any evidence we can gather from the present practice of primitive races—not in itself a conclusive proof of prehistoric practice, but a helpful indication—points nearly always to the utilitarian purpose of the dance, though opinions may differ as to the particular needs that the dance was originally intended to satisfy. An interesting account is given by Mr Chalmers (quoted from his book, *Pioneering in New Guinea*, by Dr W. E. Oesterley) of the reply made to him by an old chief, who was asked to explain the

meaning of the ceremonial dancing and drum-beating in his village. It is too long to repeat here, but it leaves no doubt as to the utilitarian objective of both ceremonies, the whole argument being summarized in the sentence with which the chief concluded his explanation: 'Dances are never merely useless'.

¶ Sir William Ridgeway, in *Dramas and Dramatic Dances*, narrates a similar inquiry made of an Eskimo chief by Mr E. W. Hawkins, with regard to the ceremonial dances which the latter saw being performed by the two Eskimo tribes who live at the mouth of the River Yukon. Among other explanations received by him was the very significant one that 'they did not dance for pleasure alone, but to attract the game that their families might be fed'. From these two living examples of tribal dancing one may fairly infer that among the peoples who first danced in prehistoric times utilitarianism coloured the purpose of the dance even more strongly.

¶ The Horn Dancers again enlighten us here; for it is evident to the most casual observer of their annual performance that, while they dance with real pride and enjoyment, they also show throughout a restraint, even a solemnity, that would certainly be absent from a social dance on the village green. The Fool is allowed a certain licence with bladder and a ready wit, but the long

day's ceremony has none of the characteristics of a revel. If strangers from without show any sign of wishing to introduce a frivolous element, some one will be sure to remark reprovingly that 'the dance is not what it used to be'; they make 'too much of a joke of it', and so on—though the 'joke' is not apparent to anybody outside Staffordshire. But they could not tell you why they feel like this about the Horn Dance, or what constitutes its seriousness. The utmost that might be extracted from them would be an admission that if it were omitted, or danced in any other way, some ill luck might befall the village. That expresses the serious purpose of the traditional dancer all the world over, and it affords very good circumstantial evidence of the original utilitarian purpose of all dancing.

The story of the origins of the dance is the story of what is known as the folk dance. How folk dancing has grown to be the parent of social dancing and spectacular dancing—of ball-room jazz and Russian ballet, for example—is not the purpose of this book, though the fringe of these interesting side-issues may be touched upon in passing. Our main purpose will be to trace the gradual evolution of the dance from the earliest prehistoric instances known to us, with references throughout to surviving traditional dances belonging to various countries, including our own. The Abbot's

Bromley Horn Dance has been taken as a starting-point for this survey because the different elements in its composition—its seasonal character; the participation of the whole community; the impersonal nature of the dancers; the symbols they carry in the bow-and-arrow, the hobby horse, the wooden cup; the presence of the man-woman; the serpentine movements of the dance itself—offer familiar features to be found frequently recurring in the dance all down its history and in different parts of the world. The Horn Dance—and the same could be said of almost any surviving ritual dance—bears upon it indelible marks of the long growth of the dance of the folk, from its inception in prehistoric times down to its survival in an alien civilization to-day, where we find it bereft of nearly all its original purposes, but still embedded in the deeply rooted elemental sentiments of the folk who refuse to let it die.

## CHAPTER II

### THE DANCER OF THE CAVES

WHO WAS THE FIRST DANCER? The search for an answer to this question opens up a voyage of discovery so vast that the adventurer who embarks upon it is launched at once on illimitable seas of research and conjecture. 'Prehistory shades into history, so that what is prehistoric in one region is historic in another,' said Sir W. Boyd Dawkins in his paper on the place of man in the Tertiary period, read before the British Association in 1927. So the cave-dweller of the Dordogne and the Pyrenees—'as pretty a man as ever walked this earth', Dr R. R. Marett calls him—the hunter who came into Europe an emigrant from Asia or Africa, may possibly in the land of his origin have 'shaded into' the beginnings of a neolithic culture and even caught up some of the funerary beliefs and rites of the earliest inhabitants of the Nile valley. We cannot say positively whether the representations of dancing figures in the palæolithic caves should be placed chronologically earlier or later than the prehistoric statuette of a woman dancer (to which we shall return presently) which was discovered at Tukh in Egypt.

But the artists of the caves, belonging to a period that, we are told, may stretch back to anything between twelve and four thousand years ago, have so far provided us with the earliest evidences of dancing in Europe ; and as they happen to have been of the same original stock as the cave-dwellers who wandered north as far as Britain when the latter was still part of the Continent, they may be considered to have a prior claim upon our attention. It is, after all, only an anthropological accident that the forerunners of our Horn Dancers should have left us what may be called the earliest known pictures of dancing in the caves of Southern France and not in the caves of Britain.

Much significance, from the point of view of the origins of the dance, attaches to the fact that in most of the human representations that have been discovered in the caves the heads appear to be those of animals. One of the best known is seen on a fragment of bone disc, preserved in the Museum at St Germain-en-Laye, which shows the figure of a man capering with outstretched hands and uplifted foot—almost in the posture of a morris dancer—in front of what remains of the outline of a bear, the dancer's own head being evidently intended for that of a wolf or bear. A drawing of a man masquerading as a mammoth is also to be seen on the wall of one of the caves at Les Combarelles (Dordogne) ; and many other similar

outlines of masked human figures have been found in the caves. A particularly interesting rock drawing (Château des Eyzies) shows a row of unmasked human figures, all bearing spears or sticks and advancing toward a bison, an example that is included here because, although possibly intended for a hunting incident, it has a curiously processional appearance. This is still more marked in another representation on a fragment of bone carving, found at Chancelade, which shows seven human figures grouped round the head, spine and two dismembered legs of a bison, in a manner highly suggestive—and the more so since these figures, with one possible exception, are unarmed—of some ceremony in connection with a slain animal.

More directly indicative of dancing than these processional groups are the little masked and apparently jumping figures of a young girl and boy, delineated on hard chalk and also preserved at St Germain; and three masked semi-human figures, carved on bone, which are known as 'Les Diablotins de Teyjet' (Dordogne). The significance of these imp-like creatures must remain a mystery, unless they may be taken as demonstrating some glimmering of belief in the supernatural, perhaps even the beginnings of ancestor worship. Of course it is also possible that, their heads being those of goats and their bodies covered with fur,



they may be intended, not for devils at all, but just for juvenile human figures masked as goats, to whom a specially freakish turn has been given by the artist. Be this as it may, they are quite clearly leaping and springing in a way that can be fairly described as dancing.

From a comparison with the tribal dances of other races, past and present, it is possible to conjecture why the cave-dweller may have pretended to be an animal when he danced at the dawn of the world. The dances of primitive man are generally mimetic. He has not learnt to express himself in any other way, and he is therefore driven to do in pantomime the things he wishes brought about. In some savage tribes, the women dance while the men are on the war-path, imitating the acts of war they suppose their warriors to be committing; and among many instances of mimetic dancing in order to promote the growth of crops by imitation magic, Sir James Frazer mentions the old Mexican festival at which the women danced with their hair loose, shaking and tossing it in order that the tassels of the maize might grow in similar profusion; while in some countries of Europe, dancing and leaping high in the air are still practised, as in Franche Comté, where dancing during the Carnival is popularly supposed to make the hemp grow tall. The Spanish Basques of Guipúzcoa perform a Wine-Skin

Dance, in which the dancers strike with their hoes alternately the ground and two distended wine-skins placed on the backs of two other men, clearly with the idea of imitating the process of tending the vines in order to stimulate Nature to fulfil the ultimate function of the vine.

A good example of the mimetic dance as still practised among the Red Indians was described to me in a letter from Mr F. W. Pethick Lawrence, written in November, 1925, after he had seen the annual harvest festival dance performed in a *pueblo* at Jemoz Springs, New Mexico. Having explained that large numbers of Indian men and women come from miles round for this ceremony, he continues :

‘ Just opposite to us in the Plaza or main street was the ceremonial “ Kiva ”, a mud hut whose only entrance was by an outside ladder through the roof. From the Kiva emerged and came down the ladder, one at a time, the men and women dancers of the “ squash ” clan. The men wore a loin cloth and had their bodies painted clay colour, the women were fully dressed but had bare legs and feet and wore on their heads blue boards with white markings and feathers standing upright.

‘ Presently they formed up, and, with a man in front holding a banner, began the dance. One man beat the tom-tom, and some thirty chanted a chorus. The rest came two or four abreast, each

man having a woman immediately behind him. The men raised their feet high and struck the ground with each foot to call the attention of the underworld. The women, who are supposed to draw their strength from the earth, never lifted their feet off it but in their hands waved branches of evergreen juniper as a symbol of life everlasting. The dance itself did not involve many convolutions. First they came very slowly forward, only an inch or two each step, for about fifty yards, then they formed up, facing one another, and wound in and out. This went on continuously for about 25 minutes, the tom-tom and dance stopping only once. After that, another clan, the "turquoise clan", with their bodies painted blue, took up the dance, which was almost exactly similar. Then the squash clan came on again, and so on alternately.'

Mr Lawrence adds the interesting information that the clans were also called 'summer' and 'winter' clans, and that one part of the dance was a thanksgiving for the past harvest, and the other an invocation for rain for the sowing, the head-dresses of the women being sky and cloud symbols. Here, as so often, we seem to have a semi-religious interpretation superimposed upon an earlier Nature ceremony; but the dance clearly originated in the mimetic rites of a primitive race who tried to assist the processes of Nature by performing them in pantomime.

This Red Indian dance, and the preceding examples given, are evidences of imitative magic as applied to crops ; but Ridgeway, who describes large numbers of Eastern dances to prove his theory that ancestor worship preceded all other primitive rites and beliefs, incidentally gives a good instance of the mimetic dance for food, performed by a tribe dependent like the cave-dwellers upon hunting. The race of the Veddas in Ceylon, when obliged to slay a deer for food, begin by making offerings to the shade of Kande Yaka, who in life was a mighty hunter. This preliminary rite is followed by a frenzied dance, executed by a shaman, or wizard, in order to summon the spirit of Kande, which in due course is supposed to enter the body of the dancer. The latter then acts dramatically the tracking and killing of the deer by the honoured ancestor, after which, presumably, the hunters set forth and do the real thing.

Another instance of the same association of ideas is furnished by the annual Inviting-in Feast of the Greenland Eskimo, at which the principal dance represents an appeal to the spirits of ancestors for future success in hunting. The old Eskimo chief, quoted in the preceding chapter, explained to his questioner that if his tribe did not take part in this dance, 'the spirits who attended the feast would be angry and the animals would stay away ; the shades of their ancestors would go hungry

since there would be no one to feed them, and their own names would be forgotten if no namesake could sing praises in the dance'.

The caves afford us no direct evidence of ancestor worship, as such, though a distant connection between this and mimetic dancing might, as I have suggested, be found by an enthusiast for Professor Ridgeway's theory in the little goat-like dancing 'Diablotins'. But there is no need to search for elaborate theories. The analogy afforded by the mimetic dances of other races gives us every right to assume that palæolithic man danced in an animal mask because, being a hunter and therefore dependent upon game for his food, he hoped through this exercise of imitative magic to secure a plentiful supply of animals for hunting. There may have been other reasons too, but there is no evidence to show what they were.

But as far as we can be sure of anything, we know that the cave-dweller was the first human being to dance in Europe, and perhaps in the world.

### CHAPTER III

#### FROM THE CAVES TO THE TOMBS

OUR DANCE DOWN the centuries takes us necessarily from West to East, from European cave to Egyptian tomb. The Tukh statuette of a woman dancer, tattooed with the gazelle, is considered by Capart to be 'probably one of the earliest female figures known, with the exception of the ivories in the South of France'. It certainly belongs to the very early period of primitive Egyptian art, which is estimated to have begun somewhere about 4000 B.C.; and the assumption that it represents a dancer rests upon the position of the arms, which, though mutilated, are clearly raised above the head in the curved position judged from later evidence to have been a characteristic dancing pose both in prehistoric and in classic Egypt (see frontispiece *b*).

On a vase from El Amrah, for example, a woman with raised and curved arms must be meant for a dancer, because the two men before whom she poses are accompanying her on a species of castanets; and in a painting on one of the primitive tombs at Hierakonapolis three women are depicted dancing in the same attitude, while among others belonging

to the Middle Kingdom period (*cir.* 2160–1788 B.C.) may be mentioned paintings on the tombs at Beni Hasan, in which groups of three and of six women, all dancing in this posture, are alternated with groups of men who seem to be executing a running step with arms outstretched horizontally. On pre-Dynastic painted pottery more examples occur; and it is interesting to compare all these Egyptian instances with models of women with upraised arms to be seen in the British Museum among the little leaden votive offerings that were found in the shrines of Artemis Orthia and of Helen and Menelaus at Sparta, belonging to the Greek archaic period (seventh to fourth centuries B.C.).

In Burmese ceremonial the Nat-Kadaws, or Nat-brides, still curve their arms overhead in this position when they dance before the Nats, or spirits of the dead. We need not, however, go so far East for a comparison, since in one of our own traditional country dances called *Haste to the Wedding*, which was collected by Cecil Sharp in Warwickshire, the dancers curve their arms overhead exactly as the ancient Egyptian lady did in the fourth millennium B.C. And, of course, it is a well-known position for the arms in many of the Celtic reels and jigs.

Classic Egyptian art contains far more evidence of different kinds of dancing than can possibly be enumerated here; for, as Professor Erman says,

in *Ægypten und ägyptisches Leben im Altertum*, 'dancing never seems to have been absent from any feast'. The dance, at first a very staid performance in which the dancers scarcely raised their feet from the ground, became much more animated as it evolved; and, as early as the Fifth Dynasty (*cir.* 2750-2625), we find a very remarkable representation of a dance performed by several girls in a row, each lifting her pointed toe high in air. In this drawing the dance so strongly resembles a figure in a modern Italian ballet that it points to the existence of a definite highly cultured school of dancing, for there is clearly nothing natural or spontaneous in such a concerted movement as is here indicated (see frontispiece *c*).

It must be remembered, of course, that although the many funerary feasts of Egypt gave the earliest and greatest impetus to her dances, the paintings in the tombs are intended to depict the secular as well as the religious life led by the buried personage in the next world; and hence the tolerable certainty that many of the dances represented there may be taken as celebrations of secular events such as would characterize the life in this world of such Egyptians. One of the inscriptions on the tomb of Harkhuf (Sixth Dynasty, *cir.* 2625-2475) is an order from the King directing this caravan leader to bring him a certain dwarf 'from the land of spirits, for the dances of the gods, to rejoice and



gladden the heart of the King Nefehere, who lives for ever'; and as a later example there is the inscription accompanying the bas-reliefs in the Der-el-Bahri tomb (Eighteenth Dynasty, *cir.* 1580-1350), mentioning that at the coronation of Queen Hatshepsut 'they leaped and they danced for the double joy of their hearts'. A fragment of painted wall from one of the tombs at Thebes (1500-1400 B.C.) is to be seen in the British Museum, which shows an interesting group of women, two of whom are dancing in curious poses, while two others clap their hands and a fifth plays the Pan-pipes. It is interesting to find this rhythmical clapping, which is naturally one of the earliest forms of accompaniment to the dance, occurring perhaps as naturally, in English country dances such as Galopede and Christchurch Bells.

Certain of the Egyptian dancing postures would be equally familiar to English folk dancers. One of these, on the tomb of Aba, shows dancing girls standing face to face in couples, holding hands with straight arms, the right foot of one, raised horizontally, touching the left foot of the other. Morris sticks and movements, too, are suggested in a Sixth Dynasty painting, representing four girls who dance opposite four others, all swinging short sticks terminating in gazelles' heads; and again in the decoration of a tomb at Denshasheh, in which a series of men, holding similar sticks, dance

in single file, the left leg raised and left arm curved overhead, the right arm held straight down and sloped backwards. The association of the gazelle symbol (as proved from other paintings) with the men of Tuat, which was the Egyptian mythical region of the dead, points to the funerary origin of these dances.

A war dance, painted on the tomb of Khiti at Beni Hasan, shows soldiers before a battle pirouetting, leaping and brandishing weapons, no doubt an act of imitative magic ; but war rarely figures in early Egyptian art, and far more characteristic of the people of the Nile valley is another dance, inscribed The Wind and occurring in a Middle Kingdom painting. In this the dancers simulate reeds and grass moved by the wind, one girl being bent backwards almost to the ground while another bends over her and a third stretches her hands over both ; and its interest lies, not only in the evidence afforded of still another dance executed with the object of bringing about something desired by means of pantomimic action, but in the fact that this is one of the earliest records of the performance of such a dance in connection with agricultural and not animal symbolism. In fact, the probability that agriculture first began in Egypt helps us to see in this painting signs of the vast change that came over beliefs and customs and was reflected in the dance, as soon as man passed out of the primitive

hunting stage into the more sophisticated stage of culture synchronous with his discovery of the art of husbandry. Instead of, or in addition to, imitating the animals around him in his dance, he would begin to imitate the processes of the vegetable world, and dance in order to stimulate those newly-discovered processes.

Further, the change of habit from the life of a nomadic hunter to that of a farmer, chained to the spot where he sowed his seed, would tend to affect man in his tribal character and thus induce the individual, whether priest or king, to emerge, and after him the god in human form. Hence (as H. J. Massingham shows in another volume of this series, *The Golden Age*) by the time we reach the first written records of Egyptian dynastic culture, roughly about 3400 B.C., agriculture, kingship and an organized religion are already established. And these may be found embodied in the person of Osiris, the god who was perhaps originally a man and a king, and has been called 'the first farmer'. If Dr Wallis Budge's conclusion is the true one, and the Osiris myth 'was developed naturally from the cult of the ancestor' (since Osiris was first identified with Egyptian gods of the dead), he certainly came to represent in time all forms of the life spirit, and was worshipped as sun and moon, as controller of seasons and rain-maker, even as the Nile itself; then as corn-god,

widening into a universal vegetation spirit, after which, in time, his cult degenerated and was merged in the phallic worship of the God Men, and so, later still, we find him being confused with the Greek god Dionysus.

The great annual festival of Osiris at Abydos, where the drama of his death and resurrection was acted and danced, is of importance to us here, because this seems to be the starting-point for the death-and-resurrection ritual which runs right through the history of the dance. The annual Osiris drama combined the features of a vegetation ritual with those of the worship of the king as the seat of the life-giving force of his whole people, a primitive notion of kingship that was probably one of the origins both of human and of animal sacrifice—another rite which has left its traces on the dance, right down to the sword dance that still survives. For the king, regarded as the source of life, became liable to the penalty of death when his powers declined, a penalty until recently exacted of the kings in the existing Shilluk tribe; and when the inconvenience of this procedure led to the substitution of some one else in his stead, generally a slave or a prisoner, the next step became the substitution of an animal, which in its turn led to the mimic sacrifice.

Here, then, we touch the springs of more than one feature of surviving folk dance—sacrifice,

mock death and resurrection, animal symbols worn or carried by dancers. There is considerable interest for us, therefore, in the paintings on the tomb of Amenemhet in the Theban Necropolis, in which is seen, in front of the mummy of the king in the funeral cortège, a sledge containing the 'tekenu' or figure of a man crouching beneath an ox-skin, which is conjectured to have been meant for a symbol of the sacrifice of the king for the purpose above mentioned, the actual victim in this case having been the ox. These paintings include another interesting feature in a representation of the 'dance of the Muu'—dancers who wore conical head-dresses, and met the procession at the entrance to the tomb.

It is not difficult to see how the cult of Osiris could have penetrated our Western civilization, bringing with it features afterwards discernible in European dances. Foucart, in his *Recherches sur l'Origine et la Nature des Mystères d'Eleusis* indicates clearly the Egyptian origin of the Demeter of Eleusis; and Professor Maspero, dealing with the probable Egyptian sources of Greek civilization, points out that, from the sixteenth century B.C., as recorded in the Theban monuments, the officers of King Thoutmôsis III and his successors went straight from the mouth of the Nile or the coast of Syria to the islands of the Ægean Sea, in Phœnician boats. As early as the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties, he

adds, the Egyptians navigated the seas, and in the Eighteenth Dynasty they are found sailing periodically to Syria, Cyprus and Asia Minor. The same writer, in his *Dawn of Civilisation*, tells us that the wandering priests of Osiris and Isis, as late as the second century after Christ, 'hawked about their tabernacles and catch-penny oracles all over the provinces of the Roman Empire', their traces being found 'so far afield as the remote parts of the Islands of Britain'.

Through other channels also, elements of the dance originating in the life-preserving ritual of the East could have made their way westwards. Europeans are directly linked with their Aryan ancestors through the fragmentary records of a similar Nature ritual, which are to be found in the hymns of the Rig-Veda, written between one and two thousand years before the Christian Era. One of these fragments, already mentioned, describes the dancing Maruts, companions of the god Indra; the ancient Vedic literature also furnishes records of a kind of ritual drama, in the form of dramatic dialogues, embodying a ceremonial marriage which, like the death-and-resurrection episode, has persisted in folk drama and dance through succeeding ages, and survives still in the mock marriage of the English mumming-play and corresponding folk observances in Europe.

Western civilization further came undoubtedly

into touch at a later period with other Eastern cults whose rituals contained these same salient features. Such was the worship of the Sumerian-Babylonian god Tammuz, which can be traced back to 3000 B.C. ; and a corresponding religion was that of the Syro-Phœnician divinity, Adonis, which spread first to Cyprus and the Greek islands, where records of it have been found, and thence to Greece itself. These records of Adonis worship go back only to about 700 B.C. ; but it bears marks of a much greater antiquity, so that, as Miss Jessie Weston puts it, 'the cult of Adonis offers, as it were, a half-way house between the fragmentary relics of Aryan and Babylonian antiquity, and the wealth of medieval and modern survivals'. But important as the whole cycle of Greek myth and ritual became as a vehicle for dancing, there is another and more intimate channel through which some of the more obscure symbolism of our English folk dances may have come over from the continent of Europe and so originally from the peoples of the East. Attis, the god of the Phrygians, was worshipped with a Nature ritual which, while bearing resemblance to that of the others already mentioned, is more closely allied to the mystic rites connected with the Persian god Mithras ; and we know that Mithraism was the most popular of all the religions practised by the Roman legionaries who came over to Britain during the four hundred

years of the Roman occupation here. We have actual records of this in the Roman remains found near Hadrian's Wall, and this is the district of England where most of our sword dances have been collected.

Enough has been said to show that throughout the early history of the dance, as in the story of mankind to which the dance holds up one of many mirrors, two ideas predominate, ancestor worship or the cult of the dead, and fertility rites or cult of the life spirit—and that the two became closely interwoven, the funerary element gradually being overshadowed, especially as Eastern ritual became westernized, by the fertility element, while the importance attached to the animal creation yielded to the greater importance of agriculture. The cave-dweller, with his imitative capers before the bear whose mask he wore, recedes into the primitive past, as his descendant in the vine and olive growing South, with eyes fixed alternately on the soil and on the gods that make the soil productive, celebrates the Dithyramb, or spring song and dance of Dionysus, the Greek vegetation god. And in the worship of Dionysus we find that the death-and-resurrection of Osiris at Abydos has grown into the death-and-rebirth of Nature with a corresponding change in ritual and therefore in the symbolism of the dance.

But Dionysus is also sometimes worshipped as



the Bull-god, showing that the seasonal festival was intended to apply to the whole of creation, human, animal and vegetable, and adding another explanation of the presence of animal symbols in our subsequent dance ceremonial to that arising out of the animal sacrifice already mentioned. In England, for instance, we find the Captain of the Grenoside sword dancers wearing a rabbit-skin on his helmet, while the Betty of the Earsdon team has a hairy cap. The Fool in the morris dance carries a stick, at one end of which is a bladder and the other a fox's tail; in the Brailes tradition he used to wear a calf's skin. These are all seasonal dances, certainly connected at one time with fertility ritual.

The spring Basque festival, held in Bayonne every Easter, furnishes other instances. In addition to the garlands that some of the dancers carry in the form of arches—similar to those carried in the Castleton procession in Derbyshire—one of them, called the Tcherrero, bears a horse's tail at the end of a stick, while another rides (or rather carries) the hobby horse or Zamalzain—that strange symbol of unity between man and beast of which we also have examples in England at Abbot's Bromley, at Minehead and at Padstow. 'And as to his genealogy', says Monsieur Boissel, the recognized authority on Basque tradition, 'one could discuss it for hours!'

A classic instance of the way that such symbols may survive long after their original significance has been lost is to be found in accounts of one of the rites of the Greek goddess Artemis. In this a dance known as Arkteia, apparently some form of initiation ceremony, was danced by little girls who, with their priestess, wore saffron robes and were called 'bears'. According to Dr Farnell, these dresses were 'possibly worn in order to imitate the tawny skin of a bear', and he thinks it highly probable that in still earlier times an actual bear-skin was worn by the dancers.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ARMED DANCE

IN THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS we have shown that in its earliest forms the dance, as far as we have any evidence on the subject, was utilitarian in character, that it appears to have originated in the material needs of primitive man and to have expressed his attempts by means of imitative magic to assist the processes of Nature necessary to his existence. We showed that as man developed from a hunter into a farmer, the dance developed also and came to symbolize, not only the transition from his crude dependence upon animals for food to a more complex dependence upon crops and weather and seasons, but also the transition from a vague desire to please his ancestors into an organized cult of the dead with elaborate funerary rites, and further, that the emergence of the individual, at first perhaps a farmer-king or priest, then a god, produced corresponding reactions upon ritual and consequently upon the dance which was the expression of that ritual.

We saw, too, that except for the remarkable instances revealed by the cave discoveries in Southern France, the earliest dances known seem

to have originated in Egyptian funerary and fertility rites, and that, following upon the worship of Osiris, other sources are to be found in the worship of divinities associated with Indians of Aryan speech and with other Eastern peoples, the latter being linked through the cult of Adonis, the Phœnician god, with the religion of the Greeks and so ultimately with that of the Romans who conquered Britain.

At this point it becomes difficult to thread our way through the many ramifications of the dance as it was developed by a highly cultured and imaginative people like the Greeks, and in its subsequent history ; nor is it the purpose of this book to present a history of the dance, but only to indicate as far as possible its main sources of origin. It would simplify matters, therefore, to go back over the ground already traversed and to select certain types of traditional dance and follow them, one by one, from their probable source down to any surviving forms known to us.

We could begin with no better type than the ceremonial armed dance. It has its roots in very early, perhaps prehistoric times ; it reflects the many stages of man's own evolution, and, in the specimens of it still surviving in the North of England and elsewhere in Europe, it presents some of the finest examples extant of an ancient ritual dance.

The ceremonial armed dance was not in its origins necessarily, or indeed usually, a war dance. The Pyrrhic dance of ancient Greece, which in its later developments might suggest this interpretation, almost certainly acquired its military characteristics after becoming detached from its early religious associations when it was a ritual dance performed by boys in Greece. The sword dance proper, as it has come down to us, is full of history, showing not only signs of an intimate connection with seasonal fertility festivals, but also more subtle indications of a possible connection with the mysteries of initiation. I should like to think that the earliest record of a ceremonial armed dance is to be found in the cave drawing of men in procession carrying spears (see Chapter II), but must regretfully relinquish its claims as being barren of scientific proof. In that case, the priority must be said at present to belong to the sword dance of the Maruts.

The Maruts were the 'gold-bedecked dancers' constantly referred to in the hymns of the Rig-Veda, who were the attendants of the Nature god Indra, and combined the characteristics of wind gods and daimons (spirits) of fertility with those of departed souls. They danced on occasions when sacrifices were offered to Indra; it is just possible that there was a sex symbolism in the lances they carried—'The adorable Maruts, armed with bright

lances, and cuirassed with golden breastplates'—and they were apparently associated with the worship of Indra as rain-god, for we find them addressed in one of the Vedic hymns as 'Bringers of rain and fertility, shedding water, augmenting food'.

'With songs of praise they danced round the spring', runs one reference to their dance; and according to another, 'When the Maruts spear-armed dance, they' (i.e. the Heavens) 'stream together like waves of water'. Their impersonal characters as visitants from another world, or at all events as a troop of semi-divine beings set apart for a special purpose, is revealed in the line describing them as being 'ever young brothers of whom none is elder, none younger'; and Miss Jessie Weston, who gives an interesting description of the Maruts in her book *From Ritual to Romance*, quotes from Professor von Schroeder to show that there was a tendency among Aryan peoples generally to regard the dead as assuming the character of daimons of fertility. In his *Mysterium und Mimus im Rig-Veda* the Professor suggests further that this accounts for the European Feast of Souls, which used to be held annually at the beginning of winter, and then, becoming Christianized like many a pagan feast, was converted into the Church festival of All Souls in November—an idea that is worth remembering in connection with the fact that

the English sword dance is traditionally performed about Christmas time.

A striking parallel may be found between the Maruts and the Masniou, who were followers of the Egyptian god Horus. Unfortunately, we have no actual records of their dancing, or this would give us a still earlier example of the ceremonial sword dance ; but as it is extremely unlikely that, being engaged in Egyptian ritual, they did not also dance ceremonially, it is worth noting that, like the Maruts, the Masniou were a guard rather than a troop of soldiers, that they belonged to the second rank of the priesthood, being referred to on one occasion as royal children, and certainly occupied a room on each side of the temple of Horus known as the 'masnit'. They are represented on the walls of the temple of Edfu with shaven heads, and as carrying a lance in one hand and a short dagger in the other ; here they seem to be considered soldiers, but elsewhere they are represented as doing manual work in the sanctuaries and as forgers in iron. This shows their semi-divine character, for iron was the metal of the sky in Egyptian mythology, and Horus is sometimes represented carrying an iron spear.

The Kouretes, who are the Cretan parallel to the Maruts and Masniou, certainly danced with swords in their hands, and were also a band of armed youths of semi-mythical character, who were

probably fertility daimons because they are compared to nymphs and satyrs in a passage of Hesiod quoted by Strabo. The following extracts from a fragment, discovered in Crete, of the Hymn of the Kouretes, evidently addressed to their leader as embryo god, refers to their functional activities: 'Io Kouros, most great, I give thee hail, Kronian, lord of all that is wet and gleaming, thou art come at the head of thy Daimones. To Dikte for the year, oh march, and rejoice in the dance and song that we make to thee with harps and pipes mingled together. . . . To us also leap for full jars, and leap for fleecy flocks, and leap for fields of fruit, and for hives to bring increase . . . and for young citizens.'

There is no doubt here as to the connection between the dance of the Kouretes and some life-renewing rite. But Jane Harrison, basing her theory upon a terra-cotta relief preserved in the Louvre, suggests a connection also with initiation rites. In *Themis* she reminds us that initiation rites among many peoples are marked by the mock slaying of the neophyte, and that armed dances, not necessarily warlike, form part of such ceremonies, accompanied by clashing of sword and shield, either to make a hubbub or as a rhythmic accompaniment to the dance—just as we find the sword dancers of the North of England still clashing their swords at the beginning and end of their



dance, in some traditions of it, such as those of Ampleforth and Kirkby Malzeard. Strabo quotes several legends about the Kouretes, one of which asserts that the noise was made in order to frighten away Saturn when they were carrying off his child, the infant Zeus ; more amusing references derive the name Kouretes from the fact of their 'wearing long dresses like girls', or from the way they wore their hair, and suggest that they were sometimes confused with warlike people because 'the practice of armed dances, first introduced by persons who paid so much attention to their hair and their dress . . . afforded a pretence for men who passed their lives in arms to be themselves called by the same name'.

The custom of impersonating the ghosts of ancestors in initiation ceremonies may account for the fact that the Kouretes daubed themselves with white clay (as the Red Indian dancers still paint themselves clay-colour); though this is open also to the explanation that they were merely trying to make themselves strictly impersonal. Either motive, or some other, might be the origin of the similar custom followed until recent years by some of the English sword and morris dancers—the Sleights (Yorkshire) team, for one—of blackening the face. They did not know why they did this, except that it had always been done ; and perhaps, as one of the Herefordshire

morris men told the late Cecil Sharp, when he asked why they put a black smudge on each cheek (all that remained of the custom): 'Maybe it's so that no one shall know who we are.' The practice followed by many traditional dancers in this country of dressing uniformly in white, or partly in white, has been sometimes advanced as another example of this racial instinct to avoid personality when performing a rite.

The sword dance of the Korybantes, the Phrygian counterparts of the Kouretes, seems to have been wilder and more orgiastic; it was accompanied with self-mutilation and loud clashing of swords, leading some commentators to think that it was a sacrificial dance and that the noise was intended to drown the cries of the victim, though, as already suggested, this does not necessarily follow. The dance of the Korybantes, who are said to have been so called, by one classic writer, 'from their dancing gait and butting with their heads', was also evidently connected with some Nature rite; for they are sometimes called the children of Helios and are represented as dancing and clashing their swords at dawn, the mythological marriage of Sun and Moon—which seems to link them up again with the Masniou, who attended upon Horus. But a still more interesting link is supplied here by Strabo, who mentions casually that another fable calls both the Kouretes and Korybantes the

descendants of the Dactyli, who lived at the foot of Mount Ida, were also 'attendants upon the mother of the gods', and 'discovered and forged iron and many other things which were useful for the purposes of life'.

This seems to establish a direct sequence between Masniou, Maruts, Kouretes, Korybantes, Dactyli—of whom three groups at least performed the armed dance, and the remaining two probably did—and to connect them all, whether as fertility daimons or forgers of iron (the metal of life), in their function of stimulating the processes of Nature. It is a curious coincidence that the North Skelton sword dancers are ironstone miners, while the majority of the English teams are of coal miners (and coal is certainly the mineral of life in modern days), only three consisting of agricultural labourers, and one of fishermen (Flamborough).

Before carrying on this sequence, it might be enlightening to glance aside at the ceremonial armed dance that is sometimes performed in the marriage ceremony, especially as some of the features of the surviving sword dance do not seem to be satisfactorily explained by a reference to anything that has already been described. Dr Oesterley, in his book *The Sacred Dance*, mentions an instance in the Jewish Old Testament (Cant. vi. 13), where the bride performs a solo sword dance, and he describes a similar wedding dance customary

among Syrian peasants, and a third that is danced by two friends of the bridegroom in the neighbourhood of Beirut. It has been sometimes suggested that these particular dances are relics of the custom of marriage by capture ; but in view of the fact that the popular belief in this custom is not held universally by scholars, and seeing that it is the bride herself who sometimes wields the sword in the dance, it is more reasonable to accept the theory that the sword dance at weddings symbolizes the expulsion of those evil influences that were formerly thought to surround a newly married couple. This supposition is borne out by the performance of a sword dance as a prelude to the mock marriage in the Nature folk play that is still acted in Thrace, where there is no hint of capturing the bride or anyone else.

The sword dance of the Roman *Salii* seems to supply the necessary link between the earlier ceremonial armed dances, which were performed by youths dedicated to some god, and the sword dances that we find being performed in our own country to-day by traditional teams of men, who guard the privilege as jealously as any priesthood, each in its own village, only admitting a new member to the team when some one drops out through death or removal to another district. Like the *Maruts* and others mentioned above, the *Salii* were young men of priestly origin who were

dedicated to the god Mars in his capacity as a vegetation deity. In his honour the Salii offered sacrifices and performed dances at the Ides of March, when they carried shields, thought to have been originally skins stretched on a frame, and swords or spears which, in a bas-relief reproduced by Miss Harrison, undoubtedly suggest drum-sticks, though we may not wholly accept her inference that both shield and spear in this case were formerly instruments of percussion intended to provide a rhythmical measure for the dance. Indisputably, however, the armed dance of the Salii was an integral part of the spring festival of Mars, the prominent feature of which was the pantomimic expulsion of the Old Year and induction of the New Year, accompanied in another act of the same dramatic ritual by a mock marriage between the two.

Here we have the sword dance for the first time associated with dramatic action, and this as part of the spring festival of Mars, which was one source at least of the mediæval folk fertility play that flourished all over Europe, that still survives in a corrupt form in Thrace and elsewhere, and formed almost certainly one channel through which the sword dance was widely diffused and could have reached Britain itself. For the distribution of this ceremonial armed dance is fairly wide, and it has been found, not only in England and parts of

Scotland, but also all over Germany, in Scandinavia, Spain, France—especially in the Basque Provinces—and the Near East, where Professor Pospisil of Brno University has made a very fine and careful collection of sword dances from Czechoslovakia, Jugo-Slavia and the Ukraine. But it is doubtful if it exists anywhere to-day in such perfection of form, and with such an apparently unbroken tradition behind it, as in England, where Cecil Sharp collected some twenty varieties of it, either from teams of men who are still dancing it as it has been handed down to them, as at Earsdon (Northumberland), Winlaton (Durham), Kirkby Malzeard (Yorkshire), and some eight or nine other places; or from aged survivors of teams that danced it until some time in the last century, as in the case of the very beautiful Ampleforth dance, which he took down only a few days before the death of the bedridden old man who described it to him—in this case so complex a specimen that the two had to work it out on the old dancer's counterpane with the aid of china ornaments from the mantelshelf.

## CHAPTER V

### THE RITUAL DANCE IN ENGLAND

THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE who have heard of the ritual dance that is performed annually in Seville Cathedral is probably far greater than the number of those who have heard of the annual performance of ritual dances in England, which, though not performed in church, are thought by many to be just as beautiful, as mysterious and as full of tradition as the Spanish survival. Our legacy in this country from the mass of ancient rites and beliefs that flowed into the European fertility drama from the East lingers in three forms—the mumming-play, the sword dance and the morris dance. All three were probably closely associated at one time; to-day the morris dance appears as a separate development, showing little trace, as a dance, of any former connection with the other two; but in three versions at least that are extant of the folk play, the Revesby, the Bellerby and the Ampleforth, the sword dance is an integral part of a crude drama, exhibiting in somewhat degenerate form the well-known features of Nature ritual—the symbolic marriage and the mock death and resurrection.

Of these, the Bellerby version is the only one that is regularly performed every year; it owes its survival to the parish priest, who, just before it would have been irrevocably lost, collected the text from such villagers as could recall it and prevailed upon them to reproduce it on the traditional date. Miss Maud Karpeles has noted down the sword dance belonging to it, and much interest will attach to the eventual publication of the whole. The Revesby play was found in a manuscript belonging to the end of the eighteenth century, but the sword dance, though mentioned as occurring in it, is unfortunately not described. The Ampleforth play was collected, almost sentence by sentence, from the last surviving player in it, on whose track Cecil Sharp was put by the old man who gave him the Ampleforth sword dance and happened to mention that in his youth 'there were some words with it'. Realizing that this meant something more than the mere Calling-on song that occurs at the beginning of most of the sword dances that have been found in England, the collector did not rest until he had found the valuable survivor, again just in time to secure the prize before the old fellow died. The fact that the sword dance is found in many cases apart from any play should remind us that it may have come to us from more than one source, and that some of those sources, the mysteries of initiation ritual for example, are



older than the Roman New Year play. On the other hand, the dance of the Maruts may have been connected with the dramatic dialogues of the Rig-Veda, so again we are faced with the consciousness that there is still much to discover about the sword dance before we can be sure of anything.

The Ampleforth dance contains the best elements of this type of ritual dance, with its intricate figures and sinuous movements, all executed to a smooth and running step by the six dancers, each of whom holds the handle of his own sword in his right hand and the point of his neighbour's sword in his left hand, thus making the unbroken ring-formation that is characteristic of the sword dance and helps to create the symbolic atmosphere that accompanies it. Few can take part, however imperfectly, in one of these sword dances without feeling in some dim manner that they are thereby brought into contact with a limitless past ; and it is not difficult to understand how some of the traditional teams of Yorkshire, Durham and Northumberland meet week after week, all the year round, to go through their sword dance in preparation for its public and ceremonial performance when the time comes at the turn of the year.

From such records as exist it appears that the form of the sword dance has not altered much since the days of Olaus Magnus, who described it as it was danced by the Goths and Swedes. The

figure that persists almost universally in it, both in records of the past and survivals of the present, is the one variously called the Rose, Glass, Shield, Lock or Nut (Knot), in which the swords are fashioned into the form of a polygonal figure, pentagon or otherwise according to the number of the dancers, which ranges from five to eight. This feature of the dance, varying in the different traditions, helps to indicate the several origins of it. Sometimes, as in the Shetlands, the Lock is placed like a crown on the head of each dancer in turn, an action that might be taken to symbolize the crowning of the king, or his mock marriage—the possible connection between kingship and the institution of marriage cannot be discussed here—while the mock death is a frequent occurrence (and of course the chief dramatic incident in the dance of the folk plays), the Lock being placed round the neck of one of the attendant characters and the swords drawn simultaneously by the dancers, upon which the decapitated victim feigns death, sometimes most realistically, as in the Grenoside version. Occasionally, even when the dance is not attached to an actual play, the resurrection of the dead person is also acted, as in the Haxby sword dance (no longer performed traditionally), in which the Clown, after the mimic decapitation, is revived by the man-woman, 'Besom-Betty'. The much rarer incident of

hoisting one of the dancers on to the Lock, as in a Basque sword dance, might symbolize equally a coronation or a sacrifice.

The many threads of tradition running through these sword dances are woven into the various names given to the additional characters who accompany the performers, both in the sword and morris dances. These usually include a man and a man-woman (i.e. a man dressed as a woman and sometimes masked), a couple reminiscent of fertility drama; and we find them severally termed King and Queen, Lord and Lady, Squire and Moll, Fool and Maid Marian, and so on; but the commonest titles are the impersonal Tom and Bessy (or 'Dirty Bet'), so that at one time the Northumbrian sword dancers were known as the 'Tommies and Bessies'. In the Winster processional dance the King and Queen who lead the dance are a decorous and dignified couple; but, generally speaking, the additional characters in England have degenerated into grotesques and now supply a kind of comic relief. The man-woman in the Basque dances, on the contrary, is a very grand person, beautifully dressed and an accomplished participant in the dance; but one gathers that 'she' is not above cracking a joke on occasion, for Monsieur Boissel explained recently to an English audience that the present 'Cantinière' of the La Soule dancers, who 'is only about fifty

years old', replaces a gipsy 'who had become too free in "her" remarks'.

Speaking of the Basque dancers, one should not forget to mention that some of these form part of the very interesting Mystery plays, called Pastorales and Mascarades, which are acted about Carnival time and appear to be survivals of old ritual dramas, in a form less corrupt and grotesque than our mumming-play as we now have it. Suggestions of something older and more significant linger in the Calling-on songs of our sword dance, though on the whole these have also degenerated into broad comedy, with many interpolations which give to the sword dancers, as each is called forward in turn by the leader, different characters ranging from Samson to Nelson. Two verses may be quoted here for the sake of possible ancient allusions in both. The first is the wind-up of the Earsdon Captain's song, evidently a reference to the sacramental feast or sacrifice :

Now I'm going to kill a bullock,  
Of that I'll make you sure ;  
We'll kill it in Earsdon Town,  
And divide it amongst the poor.

The second is the song of the Fool who used to accompany the Kirkby Malzeard dancers, wearing a dinner bell and a fox's tail attached to his

belt ; and it contains a curious reference to the Queen :

A fox's tail ! a fox's tail !

It's noo to be seen ;

Although I go ragged and wear an old coat,

Who knows but I'm loved by the Queen ?

There is not space here to discuss all the suggestive features of this ritual dance—why, for instance, all the Yorkshire sword dances should be performed with the long sword, and all those of Durham and Northumberland with the short sword ; why the latter should have a handle at both ends and be flexible, more like some instrument than a sword—unless this harks back to the forging instrument carried in one hand by the Masniou, according to one representation of them ; why the Flamborough men should carry the sword in the left hand and over the left shoulder, and so on, and so on. But because of all these queer remnants of tradition, added to its seasonal performance between Christmas and the New Year—though the teams sometimes go round dancing on special occasions as well, such as Bank Holiday—we can claim it as a genuine ritual dance, of a greater antiquity than can be satisfactorily explained by a reference to the mediæval folk play or even the earlier fertility rites of the vegetation god of Greece or Rome. I cannot help thinking that if one of the channels

through which it came to Britain was by way of the Roman occupation, this may account for the indefinable strain of mysticism running through it, which could be explained by the worship of Mithras said to have been practised by the Roman legionaries. One of the features of this ritual was certainly the sacramental feast, of which there are signs, already mentioned, in the sword dance that may have lingered on in the common feast that some of the teams used to enjoy together at the end of their winter season. But I admit it may be necessary to have danced a sword dance and to have felt it proceeding rhythmically, inevitably and with increasing emphasis and intensity to the dramatic climax, to be able to accept assumptions that must to others seem far-fetched if not utterly fantastic.

The morris dance is conjectured by Sir E. K. Chambers (see *The Medieval Stage*) to have been developed originally from the sword dance, a theory with which Cecil Sharp, in his short posthumous book, *The Dance*, is inclined to agree. An interesting confirmation of this is afforded by the 'Makil Dantza', or stick dance, of Guipúzcoa, which is a kind of morris dance and forms part of a sword dance that is performed annually at the feast of Corpus Christi, often actually in the churches. The presence of this and other morris dances in the Basque Provinces might seem to

support the idea that the name originally meant 'Moorish' and that the dance came from Spain. But apart from the fact that the dance is too widely distributed in Europe for this to be a tenable theory, the Basque morris dance, if not attributable to a common origin in the past, which is the most reasonable supposition, could be also explained by the long English occupation of that area of France in the time of the Black Prince. It may be left to others to determine whether, in the latter case, the French learned the dance from the English soldiers or the English from the French soldiers; but it is always important to remember that the discovery of a dance in a certain locality cannot be taken as a certain proof of its being native to that spot. The Kentucky Running Set, an English dance still popular in the Appalachian Mountains, might have been assigned to an American source had it not fortunately been found there by a collector whose knowledge enabled him to detect its real nationality, without the help of historic evidence to prove that it had been brought there by English settlers more than two hundred years before.

Sir E. K. Chambers also first made the suggestion, now pretty generally accepted, that the faces of the morris dancers 'were not blackened because the dancers represented Moors, but rather the dancers were thought to represent Moors

because their faces were blackened', which leaves the popular derivation of the word untouched. What matters more than the etymology is that the former custom of blackening the face, already discussed in connection with sword dancers, refers the morris dance also to a ritual origin. It, too, is danced traditionally by men only, and although in figures and formation it is a simpler dance than the sword dance, the steps and hand movements are both varied and difficult of execution, and its performance demands a long and arduous training. It is devoid of the dramatic elements that characterize the other dance, but is linked with it and the mumming-play through the supernumerary characters that accompany the dancers—the Fool and others—and through the symbols that they carry.

Miss Jessie Weston sees in the morris dance 'many of the theriomorphic features so closely associated with Aryan ritual', and lays stress on the sex emblems—sword and chalice—carried in the Abingdon tradition (though the latter may indicate also the sacramental feast of Mithraic ritual), and in the animal skin or tail worn traditionally by the Fool. A possible Aryan source is further suggested in the old Whit Hunt, which until the middle of last century took place, four days running in Whitsun Week, in the forest of Wychwood; each day a deer was run down and killed by the villagers,



and then divided among the people of one of the four villages concerned in it, after which the morris men went round the district dancing till nightfall. The spectral Hunt, no doubt associated with ancestor worship, was an integral part of Aryan ritual; so we have here traces of more than one probable source for the morris dance. The sacramental feast may be discerned in the former custom, at Kidlington in Oxfordshire, of killing and eating a lamb, which was carried about on a pole after being slaughtered, and 'attended with Music and a Morisco Dance of Men, and another of Women' (see Blount's *Ancient Tenures*). This, too, took place on Whit-Monday, for the morris dance seems always to have been danced at Whitsuntide—when Cecil Sharp first saw it at Headington on a Christmas Day it was being danced for some special reason, and the leader apologized to him for doing it on the wrong day—and must therefore have been connected with the spring and not the mid-winter Nature festival. At the only village in England where the morris is now danced traditionally—at Bampton in Oxfordshire on Whit-Monday—the fruits of the earth, rather than the products of the animal kingdom, are indicated in the cake that is impaled on a sword and carried about with the dancers all day.

It is not easy to explain the handkerchiefs with which the men in some morris traditions emphasize

their hand movements. On the assumption that the dance was evolved from the sword dance in its progress towards becoming a spectacular dance, the sticks used in other of the traditions can be explained as substitutes for the original swords; but except for a few instances elsewhere in which handkerchiefs have been found linking the dancers together, there does not seem to be any real proof of transition from sword to handkerchief. Nor is there any conclusive proof that the morris was really derived from the sword dance. In England, the hundred odd specimens of it that were collected by Cecil Sharp, in most cases from old men who had danced it in their youth, were all found in the Midlands away from the sword dance counties; so the possibility remains that it had an entirely independent origin of which we know nothing, on which point it is worth while to recall the morris attitudes of the dancers of Tuat (see Chapter III).

All that we can say at present with certainty is that the morris seems now to be associated with the spring and with the life-preservation ritual that runs through the story of the dance. Some explanation may be found here of the bells worn by the morris dancers and by the Clown or Fool accompanying them, which also distinguish the 'Satans' and the 'Tcherrero' of the Basque spring festival, as well as some of the players in the Thracian folk play; for in one of the little villages high up

on the mountain-side in Savoy I was assured by the peasants, one spring day, that they were ringing the church bells 'to keep the hail from the fruit trees'. But the morris has by this time become so spectacular a dance that bells and handkerchiefs and ribbon baldricks and rosettes, and all the rest of its finery, may be utterly devoid of any deep and hidden meaning. At the same time, the traditional performance of it at Bampton is regarded as something so much more serious than a mere Bank Holiday festivity that few would omit to put a coin in the box of the cake-bearer and to carry off a morsel of the cake, 'to sleep on for luck', when the morris men come leaping down the street on Whit-Monday, often to the tune and step of Green Garters that the folk dancers of the modern revival have made familiar to many audiences.

This brings us to the third type of English ritual dance, the processional. Although the country folk sometimes call the processional dance by the generic name of morris—as they do also the sword dance—it is only strictly speaking a morris dance when thus performed by the Bampton morris men, and also possibly in the case of the processional danced once a year as a ceremony by the Winster morris team, though this latter has country dance interpolations in it. The ordinary processional dance that has been found in various parts of England, and also of course abroad, is more of the

nature of a country dance, and is possibly traceable to the May Day festival when it was accompanied round the parish boundary with the maypole and other ritualistic relics of the spring fertility drama. At Castleton, where the processionists carry green garlands, and at Tideswell (both in Derbyshire), and at Middleton in Lancashire, the processional dance is still, I believe, kept alive, though only occasionally performed; while at Winster, at Knutsford, and at Helston, it is a regular annual feature, and in the two latter cases all the inhabitants dance in it on May Day. At Helston in Cornwall the processional follows the old ritual of taking benign influences to every household, and expelling the evil influences at the same time. The band leading the procession plays the traditional tune, and the inhabitants follow after, dancing in and out of the houses all round the town; although everybody does not dance the traditional dance, which is a very pretty one—a tripping step forward for a few paces, then the figure ‘hands across’, or a swing, which belongs to the country dance. This Helston dance is akin to the Farandole of Southern France, and it is thought that the local name for it, the Furry Dance, may be a corruption of the French word.

Another May Day procession, which is rather a ceremonial parade than a dance, is the little hobby horse ceremony that takes place every year

at Minehead and at Padstow, evidently to spread good fortune in the same symbolic fashion. The theory that this queer creature was originally bestridden by St George in one of the folk plays offers rather too modern an interpretation of its presence in the spring festival, which suggests the older parallel of parading sacred animals, before sacrifice, round the district, as, to add another example, the 'Fratres Arvales', brethren of the ploughed fields, did in the special dance that was performed in honour of Mars and the Lares at the Roman feast of the Ambarvalia. A variant is suggested in the cardboard dragon paraded by the Chinese when they want rain.

These processional dances of England and elsewhere—Miss Harrison gives a delightful description of the one she saw at Echternach—have their counterpart in Old Testament history. Among the Israelites, during the Feast of Tabernacles (see Exodus xxiii. 16: 'Thou gatherest in thy labours out of the fields') there were processional dances in which the people carried palms and branches of trees, like those borne by the Basques and the Red Indians and the Castleton processionists; and in the well-known example of David and the Israelites dancing in procession before the Ark, the original Hebrew has five different words to describe the successive stages of this dance, from which Dr Oesterley surmises that it began with

an ordinary dance step and then proceeded to a rotatory motion, followed by jumping, skipping and whirling.

The leaps and capers that are peculiarly characteristic of the morris dance seem also to have marked the processional dances of the Roman Salii in October, when Saturn, the god of sowing, was worshipped; and Sir James Frazer, conjecturing that these were mimetic and intended to make the crops grow high, mentions other colleges of priests in ancient Italy who 'were supposed to contribute to the fertility of the earth by their leaps and dances'. The capers of the morris men, whatever may be the other sources of their dance, therefore bring the English ritual dance again into line with the dances that characterize the agricultural festivals of antiquity.

## CHAPTER VI

### DANCING IN A CIRCLE

WHEN WE MEET the circular dance in the English country dance, which is especially rich in 'rounds', its immediate sources in the May Day dance, and possibly the Midsummer dance round the bonfire, are easily detected; but of course these two comparatively recent survivals of the seasonal circular dance are themselves relics of much older rites that can be traced back to the magic and religious practices of primitive man. And when we think we have reduced the original purposes of the circular dance to two—the consecration of some central object and its protection from evil influences from without—we find that behind these again there may lie a still more ancient impulse to imitate the movements of the sun and the planets.

As an act of consecration, the ceremonial encircling of the sanctuary, or of the sacrificial victim, was frequently to be met with among the Semitic peoples. Instances of it occur among the ancient Arab peoples and in the Old Testament; a familiar example is recorded in 1 Kings xviii. 26, where the priests of Baal are described in the Hebrew as

executing a limping step round the altar. This dance seems to have been resorted to as a last appeal to the god who had hitherto paid scant attention to his worshippers, and may have been intended to excite pity, though another possible interpretation is that this curious step was adopted as a means of producing a state of emotional frenzy in the dancers. A reference to the step may be meant in Genesis xxxii. 31, where Jacob is said to have 'halted upon his thigh' as the sun rose over Penuel; and Dr Oesterley reproduces further evidence to support a conjecture that at this particular spot, known to be a sanctuary, the limping dance was performed ceremonially in connection with sun worship. Whether he can be considered as having proved his point or not, his allusions to the limping step set us wondering whether it bore any resemblance to the double-hop step with which some English folk dances, Goddesses for example, are executed.

The circular dance of the primitive Arabs round the camel they were about to sacrifice to the morning star, which is mentioned by Nilus, seems again to point to some rite in connection with worship of the heavenly body. To the modern mind, however, it seems so natural an impulse in the human race to take hands and dance round in a circle that one hesitates to ascribe this movement always to remote and obscure causes. Sir William



Ridgeway would doubtless say that it originated in ancestor worship and of this he certainly gives two convincing examples: the circular dances performed at Athens on the third day of the Anthesteria, or festival of the dead, and those performed to this day among the Indians; and in his book he reproduces a beautiful picture of Indian women dancing in a circle round the mystic figures of gods. Another Eastern dance, the famous Bon-Odori dance performed in Japan at the Feast of Lanterns in July, includes an effective figure in which a large revolving circle of peasants dance round a smaller group who sing and play the flute and drum.

Circular dances in which the dancers revolve round musicians are further illustrated in some of the clay votive offerings found in Cyprus, belonging to the sixth century B.C., which include representations of men in groups of three dancing round a fourth who plays the Pan-pipes, and similar groups of women in the same formation. A third example is of an Olympian dance in which seven women dance in a circle, their arms round one another's waists. Another instance of the circular dance performed by women holding hands is seen on an Egyptian knife handle of the pre-Dynastic period; and a very beautiful example occurs on an early Elamite (ancient Persian) vase from Khazinèh. But classic examples are far too numerous to be given in detail.

Traces of belief in magic are to be found in the circular dance round a corpse, performed with the twofold object of confining the spirit of the dead person within the circle, so that it shall not roam abroad and do harm to the living, and of pleasing the deceased by keeping off evil spirits. At a Chinese burial the mourners were seen to dance round the tomb, once immediately after the funeral, and then again three days later ; and with the same dual motive of propitiation and self-protection, the Dinka tribe of the Egyptian Soudan dances round the bodies of slain enemies. The object of the encircling dance when performed by the guests at a wedding round the bride and bridegroom, as among the Jews in Persia, may be sought similarly in the desire to keep away the evil influences formerly thought to threaten the newly married state ; though nowadays, when performed at weddings in Brittany for example, the original sinister significance of the circular dance may be presumed to have become lost in a more daring and debonair approach to marriage.

In England, if we except the sword dance, which is rather a dance of circular movements than a round dance, the representative example of the circular dance is the one we associate with our former May Day festival, when, as described in *The Medieval Stage*, the dancers would pause in their procession round the parish on coming

to some sacred spot—a tree or a well, or perhaps the parish church—and dance round it. The May Day dance came down to us by way of the European spring festival, from the much older worship of fertility gods ; and whether we call the local deity Osiris, or Dionysus, or Mars, or the patron Saint of the parish church, does not affect the basic meaning of the May Day festival, which was intended as a welcome to spring and a means both of spreading good influences all round the neighbourhood and of expelling bad influences, with the object of securing good crops and the reproduction of man and beast.

The maypole, originally a tree or the flowering branch of a tree, was used as a peg on which to hang the May garland when this was all that remained of the old symbolism of the vegetation god ; and the dance round the maypole was consequently a relic of this ancient worship, so that the Puritans, who tried to abolish maypole dancing on the ground that it was idolatrous, were, in a literal sense, completely justified of their iconoclasm. While most of the May dancers carried garlands of flowers in conscious or unconscious tribute to the vegetation spirit, a few wore the skin or some other part of an animal in reminiscence of more extended Nature rites, or perhaps of still earlier rituals already touched upon. The presence of a King and Queen of the May is not so

easy to explain satisfactorily unless we accept the theory of kingship expounded by Mr A. M. Hocart, who, considering that a belief in the divine origin of kings and in their supernatural powers was 'the earliest known religion', enables us to link this cult with the spring festival by his suggestion that the original priest-king was not a person of great majesty, but 'prosaic and at times grotesque', and that 'his humdrum function was to ensure a regular supply of food and a satisfactory birthrate by the best means inference would suggest'.

In the dances round bonfires we get a form of circular dance that seems to have existed originally almost solely for the purpose of expelling witches and other evil spirits likely to injure crops and beasts and otherwise harm the community. But their occurrence either at Eastertide, the spring solstice, or more commonly on Midsummer Eve, the summer solstice, suggests that they were also intended as a sort of sun charm, to promote fertility and successful husbandry. They took place all over Europe and in our own country, and still occur in many places at Midsummer; an effigy of a witch is sometimes burnt, even in modern days, on the ceremonial bonfire, acting as a grim reminder of the period, unhappily not so far distant, when the effigy was a real person.

The interest of both maypole and bonfire dances

lies in their legacy to us of another form of our surviving folk dance—the country dance. The May Day festival, more than the Midsummer bonfire, occupies an important place in our story of the dance, because in England it stands as a connecting link between ancient rituals, in which the dance was a solemn ceremony, and the country dance which came after it and was entirely social and recreative. The mediæval May festival was the one of all others from which the Church, although careful to substitute the blessing of wells for the rain charm, and the local saint for the vegetation god, never wholly succeeded in banishing the pagan elements. For all that, the dance round the parish and round the maypole had none of the austere nature of a rite, and, while retaining much of its outward symbolism, was regarded mainly as a pleasant occasion for revelry. It was in fact a semi-religious feast of a popular character, which degenerated into something much more meaningless by the time it ceased to be generally observed.

But while it declined as a seasonal ceremony, the processional and circular dances that were its principal feature did not decline. On the contrary, they were developed by the country-folk themselves into social dances, which, retaining indelible marks of their ancient ancestry, have thus ensured, at all events in this country, the historic continuity down to the present day of the

traditional dance. We shall have more to say about English country dances under the heading of 'Dancing for Fun'; meanwhile, it may elucidate what is claimed for them if we take one or two examples of the way they seem to reflect some of the old rites that form the background of all dancing.

At the risk of being called fantastic, I would suggest that a round like Jenny Pluck Pears, danced in a ring by three couples, in which the men and women alternately hand their partners into the middle, honour them and then skip round the circle, first the way of the sun and then the contrary way, is traceable to the ceremonial dance round the sacrificial victims. The evolutions of The Beginning of the World (Sellenger's Round) may well have originated in sun worship, a conjecture that is especially supported by the movement in which the dancers holding hands in a ring converge to the centre with raised arms; while many others, of the Gathering Peascods type, seem to point as clearly to the encircling of some stationary and sacred object. And might not the alternate circles of men and women in the latter dance, taken together with the circle danced by both, have something to do with a marriage rite?

But whether these vague speculations have any foundation or not, the existence of the English country dance is one more testimony to the undying nature of the dance of the folk.

## CHAPTER VII

### DANCING FOR FUN

‘WHY SHOULD NOT DR JOHNSON add to his powers a little corporeal activity?’ asked Dr Johnson, to whom some daring friend had repeated a ribald rumour to the effect that he was taking lessons of the great dancing-master Vestris. To justify his frivolous lapse even into a pretence of countenancing such a rumour, he added ponderously that Socrates learned to dance, as Cato learned Greek, at an advanced age. His academic excuses, though quite uncalled for, serve the useful purpose of showing that by the middle of the eighteenth century ‘corporeal activity,’ as manifested in dancing for pleasure, had become universal in the civilized world, and indeed, long before that the dance was divorced in all sophisticated societies from its original utilitarian purpose. The point at which man began to enjoy the dance he was performing primarily as a rite—a stage in his evolution that must have long preceded his conception of the dance as a social diversion—was, as we have already said, a point that can never be determined. Nor does the accompaniment of music, of which there is very early evidence, necessarily presuppose

innocent enjoyment, since, as far as we can tell, the original function of music in relation to dancing was also utilitarian. In its primitive forms the musical accompaniment seems to have consisted of some form of percussion, e.g. the discs or cymbals, beaten together by Egyptian dancers of the primitive period ; and naturally the rhythmical purpose has always been prominent in such accompaniment, so that we find in almost all countries some form of the English pipe and tabor (the latter a small drum) being used to make a measure for the traditional dance.


But from the earliest period there must have been moments when the dancer felt the joy of rhythmical movement for its own sake ; and the ceremonial dance in commemoration of victory or triumph must have conveyed a pleasurable sensation, even when religious in intention : as when the women of Israel came out 'singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tabrets, with joy and with instruments of musick' ; while David, who 'danced before the Lord with all his might', seems to have shocked his wife by the joyous abandonment with which he discarded his clothing for the purpose, so that when she saw him 'leaping and dancing before the Lord', she 'despised him in her heart'. Perhaps she felt as orthodox Church people felt when they first encountered the band of the Salvation Army.

In Egypt, as already pointed out, the paintings



in the tombs show examples of dancing that were clearly of a secular nature, though the object of displaying them here was not a frivolous one. In the old Mayan civilization the principal form of amusement, according to Mr Joyce, who describes many varieties of it in his *Mexican Archæology*, was the dance, and it was performed to the accompaniment of gongs and drums, with the occasional addition of wind instruments. The modern folk dance revivalist would be especially interested in this writer's accounts of the dances of the old Aztec civilization, in the period anterior to the Spanish conquest of Mexico; some of these convey every appearance of having been secular in intention and were danced in large circles, sometimes by men and women separately, but also by both together in the same ring, in which formation they danced in pairs, with their arms round one another's waists. It seems to have been the exclusive privilege of the upper classes to dance with their arms round one another's necks, an intimacy that has not as yet reached the modern ball-room. A very beautiful dance described by Mr Joyce consisted of figures in which a long, garlanded rope was held by the dancers, who moved in unison, sometimes in groups of three—two women and one man, or one woman and two men—reflecting the linked formation of the European sword dance.

Pleasurable dancing must have overlapped ritual dancing all through the classic period in European history, degenerating into the excesses and comic obscenities of the phallic processions, traces of which remain in the Thracian folk play of to-day. After the decline of the Greek and Roman Empires the tendency of religious dancing was to become increasingly debased and corrupt ; and it is fairly certain that only in those countries where the purer tradition of the old dances has been preserved down through the centuries by the peasantry do we find any examples to-day of the recreational dance that has sprung from that national tradition. In several modern countries, whether in continuance of an unbroken tradition or as a revival, the racial dance is being put to a social use by men and women dancing it together, or used for display purposes in its more ancient forms, as the morris and sword dances are performed spectacularly by teams of men or of women in England. This revival is taking place in varying degrees of intensity in Scandinavia, Germany, the Balkans, the United States, and other countries. I have myself seen the German Wandervögel, the youth organization that has done so much in the twentieth century to save the German racial song and dance from extinction, dancing their folk dances at every opportunity during rambles at the week-end, or at one of their innumerable conferences ; and one



year when I was at Berlin, large parties of them went out on the surrounding hills on Midsummer Eve to dance and sing all night round the bonfires.

I have also seen the peasants, both men and women, up in the mountains on the borders of France and Spain, dancing the fandango, which is a social dance of the country dance type belonging properly to Spain, and has never been allowed to die out. That was in brilliant sunshine ; a very different picture exists in my mind of a dimly lit barn, far out on the Russian steppe in the depth of winter, where, as a matter of course on a Saturday night, some one in a sheepskin coat and high fur hat sat down on a stool and began grinding out on his accordion a Slav dance tune that always brings the whole of the Near East to the mind of anyone who hears it. And at once there sprang up couples of boys and girls, and men and women, just in their ordinary farm clothes, who began to dance a queer sort of processional dance round and round the room, couple behind couple, passing in and out of the flickering light of the one oil lamp. To an English visitor the detection of certain movements common to our own dance tradition, such as 'arming' and 'siding', was almost as thrilling as to come upon this exhibition of traditional dancing, beautifully rhythmical and naturally graceful, in this out-of-the-way spot, at a moment when famine and war had devastated the country to a

point which had brought most of the dancers to the edge of starvation.

Such folk dances, wherever found, are evidence of what we might call the adaptation of old ritual dances for social purposes. But in England we are especially fortunate, not only in our rich inheritance of social folk dances, but also in the valuable testimony they afford us of the transition of the racial dance from the ritual to the social form. Our country dance is unique in more than one respect. In its derivation from the processional and circular dances of the mediæval May Day festival, it is, as already demonstrated, a folk dance of direct traditional descent; but it is also a separate creation that in this finished form has never been danced except by men and women together, for recreation. In the country dance you may find, if you know where to look, the mimetic movements of the cave dancer and the art of the seventeenth-century dancing-master. But, most important of all from the antiquarian standpoint, we are able through the country dance to bridge over the gap between the semi-religious May Day dance and the purely social dance that emerged later as a popular amusement.

To explain this more clearly it is necessary to understand how we have come by our possession of these country dances. We owe them to two sources : to the folk themselves, who continued in

some of our villages—and still do so—to dance a few of the ‘longways’ variety of country dance ; and to the wonderful collection known as *The English Dancing-Master*, which was made in Charles II’s reign by the musician John Playford, and published by him first in 1650, and afterwards republished and added to by others in seventeen subsequent editions. Both these channels were in turn explored by Cecil Sharp, who, when collecting songs and the other traditional dances up and down the country, came across about thirty country dances still surviving in the villages of Warwickshire, Yorkshire, Devonshire, Somerset and Surrey, and issued eighteen of the best among them to the public in a comprehensive form.

This chance discovery of country dance survivals sent him to the British Museum in search of Playford’s volumes ; for the dance notation that he acquired through collecting these eighteen longways dances enabled him with much additional research to decipher nearly all of Playford’s intricate descriptions, which had hitherto baffled the ordinary student. Through his subsequent publication of these the English people now have in their possession, in a form that can be understood with very little technical knowledge of dance notation, as many as one hundred and fifty-nine of Playford’s dances in addition to those collected in the villages. These reissued editions of Playford include all but

twenty of the rounds, squares and unprogressive longways dances to be found in the eighteen editions, and a large number of the progressive longways dances 'for as many as will' (of the Sir Roger de Coverley type) that are also to be found there.

The very beautiful tunes accompanying the Playford dances are surmised by Cecil Sharp to have been mainly contemporary airs that were pressed into the service of the dance by dancers or editors. In some of them he detects airs evidently borrowed from Purcell, and others appear to have been the tunes of popular songs of the period, which may account for the queer names of many of the dances. He regards this co-operation of the best musicians of the day as further testimony 'of the important place which the national dance held in the social life of that period'. At the same time, some of the less sophisticated tunes, such as the airs to which the two rounds, Sage Leaf and Jenny Pluck Pears, are set, must be much older in origin; and among the dances that are still danced traditionally in the villages, the charming old longways, The Triumph, is performed to the beautiful tune that really belongs to this dance.

And this brings us to the very interesting question of the history of the English country dance after it became separated from the May Day dance

and before it achieved the finished form seen in Playford. Except for the few May Day processional dances still performed (see Chapter V), and for the few collected longways dances that are not in *The English Dancing Master*, there is nothing in the country dances already mentioned to show what this tradition was like before the dancing-master saw its possibilities and moulded it into the varied forms in which it became the dance of the Court and the assembly rooms—the dance that Pepys mentions in his *Diary*, and Walpole in his letters, and Jane Austen in her novels; the dance that sent Mr Pickwick dancing ‘hands across’ and ‘poussette’ down the hall at Dingley Dell. To establish finally the continuity between the dance as it left the maypole and the dance as it went to Court would be to establish more or less the whole continuity of the traditional dance, at all events in one country.

This link was found by Cecil Sharp when he was collecting English folk songs in the Appalachian Mountains of North America. Here were English settlers who had never become Americanized; so it was not surprising, perhaps, that they were to be found dancing, in the Kentucky Running Set, an English country dance of the type that was missing, the type that our village folk danced when they first separated the dance from the May Day festival. In an interesting preface to his edition

of this remarkable find, the collector calls it 'the sole survival of a type of country dance which in order of development preceded the Playford dance'; and he accounts for its having reached America in this form, at a date later than that at which the more elaborate forms were already being danced in the South of England, by the explanation that dances of the same type as the Running Set 'were, in the middle of the seventeenth century, and for many years later—i.e. for some time after they had been discarded or superseded in the South—still being danced in the North of England and in the Scottish Lowlands, the very districts from which the forefathers of the present Southern Appalachians originally emigrated.' As an indication of the earlier date of the Running Set he instances the absence of ceremonious gestures, such as the 'honour', which occur throughout the Playford editions, and, much more significant, the presence of certain figures that betray a ritual origin. Such are the Californian Shuck Basket, traceable to well-worship; Wind up the Ball Yarn, evidently derived from the encircling of a tree or some sacred object (this figure occurs in the *Fire Bird* of the Russian ballet); and the two figures, Bird in the Cage and Tucker, both of which suggest some sacrificial ceremony. One or two of these figures have crept also into children's singing-games.



Thus it can be seen that by a series of fortuitous circumstances culminating in research, the English country dance has been handed down to us in a perfection that is not shown in the folk dance tradition of any other country, and gives a continuity to the story of the dance that no other folk dance tradition, as yet revealed, can be said to have done. But the Dance is also international, a fact that must not be forgotten for all our pride of race, or rather, perhaps, because of our pride of race, since we English are of many races. To remind us of its wide diffusion we may take the example given in *The Dance* by Cecil Sharp, who reproduces two diagrams to show that a certain dance step, often thought peculiar to Russia and the Near East, in which the dancer crouches down on the ground and throws out his legs alternately in front, appears both in a Saxon manuscript of the tenth century A.D. and on a Greek vase of the fifth century B.C. (depicting a dance of satyrs)—and was actually seen by him in Devon and Somerset, where it is known as the Kibby or Monkey Dance.

So whenever we think we have narrowed down some step or some figure to the individual inspiration of one people in one corner of the globe, we may be sure that we shall find it springing up again somewhere else in some other guise. The dance knows no limit of time or space, and the

effort to explore all its sources and to trace the meaning of all its manifestations represents an adventure as boundless in scope and as inexhaustible in possibility as any other attempt to track down the springs of human endeavour.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ROUND AGAIN TO THE BEGINNING

IN A DARKENED LONDON HALL, on a winter's day in the twentieth century, the distant strains are heard of an old traditional air played upon a violin. It comes nearer and nearer until the figure of the player appears dimly at the far end of the auditorium ushering in a silent company of white-clad dancers, bearing as if growing from their shoulders, high, branching antlers. With them are sundry queer figures—a clown, a man dressed as a woman, a boy carrying a bow-and-arrow, a hobby horse gambolling uncouthly to and fro. Backwards and forwards, round and round, move the shrouded figures in rhythmical unison, the tall antlers swaying with the motions of the dancers, while the strange little tune goes on and on, over and over again, with a monotony that produces almost an intoxicating effect upon the listeners. Not a sound comes from the audience of many hundreds, who sit as under a spell until the white figures gradually recede once more into the obscurity, the haunting melody dying away with them, as gradually and as completely. The lights go up again, and a thousand people sit in a London

hall, wondering how they allowed themselves to be carried away by anything so slight and so simple.

Here we go round—and our round has brought us back again to where we started, to the Horn Dance of Abbot's Bromley. We have thrown a girdle round about the earth in our search for the beginnings of that dance of antlered villagers, which, if found, should be the beginnings of all dancing. We started in the caves of Southern France and the Pyrenees, where in the work of the palæolithic artist we found traces of dancers who in their imitations of the movements of animals also wore animal symbols. We drew our slender thread eastwards, to the early civilizations of the Nile valley, where we found the dance reflecting the development of man from a hunter to a farmer, a king and a god, with an organized religion and a cult of the dead which led him to decorate his tombs with pictures of the daily life of the period. And from these pictures we learned that the Egyptians not only performed mimetic dances to encourage the processes of Nature, as the cave-dwellers did, but danced on all kinds of public occasions and for the amusement of their kings, and even appeared to have formulated a ballet of an advanced and elaborate type; and we found that the ritual of the death-and-rebirth occurred in Osiris worship.

Among these ancient civilizations our dance

through time and space brought us naturally to the home of some of the earliest users of our common Indo-European speech, in whose ancient Vedic literature we found fragmentary records of ritual drama or dramatic dialogue, containing references to sword dancing and to features of ceremonial such as the mock marriage, which afterwards characterized the mediæval folk play. We showed briefly how with the growth of the Greek and Roman Empires all these elements of the dance were widely diffused ; and in a survey of the three surviving traditional dance forms in England—the morris, the sword and the country dance—we summarized the various origins of the dance we had been seeking throughout the world. And lastly, we showed that in the English country dance, owing to the fortunate discovery in America of an earlier type, the historic continuity of the traditional dance has been maintained in this country down to the present day.

Our dance through the ages has been anything but measured. Here and there it has been an unseemly leap across a wide gap, and throughout it has left many an interesting by-way untrod. But such as it is, it has brought us round again to where we started, as we might have known it would, since a circle drawn round time and space, like the circle formed by linked sword dancers, has no beginning and no end. But it is to the

Horn Dance with a difference that we have come back. The folk dancers in the London hall were scrupulously accurate in their performance of the dance, and did not once transgress tradition by an alteration of step or figure ; but, nevertheless, the dramatic arrangement of lights, the mysterious entrance and retirement of the dancers, the austere simplicity of the musical accompaniment, the whole production of the thing, in fact, betrayed the intrusion of the artist, if not of the stage manager.

Dancing in the sense of imitative magic, to produce good hunting or to make your crops grow, may yield before the advance of civilization to dancing vaguely 'for luck' without destroying the traditional feeling of the dance. We have seen this in the attitude towards their local dance of the miners of Durham, Yorkshire and Northumberland, or the agricultural labourers of Staffordshire. But dancing the same dances for pleasure, and away from the soil whence they sprang, must almost inevitably lead to one of two things, to degeneracy or to art. The dance cannot remain quite what it was, because the spirit of the dancers and their motive in dancing are no longer the same.

In performing folk dances as a revival, even within the country of their origin, something may therefore be lost in a strictly traditional sense ; but much also is gained in compensation, whether we

regard the gain as a contribution to human happiness or as a contribution to art, or both. Further, since the original significance of the racial dance is bound to decline more and more through the intrusion of modern inventions, the dance itself would eventually die too unless it acquired some fresh permanence as an art, founded, as the best kind of art should be, upon the national culture. But this can apply only to folk dances that are so developed in the country of their origin or possibly in a country of a kindred race. When they are torn from their original source, especially if they belong to a people of a totally different culture, degeneracy can only with great skill be avoided. Fertility dances of a mimetic nature, danced in the Red Indian or the African village, have a meaning and a sincerity that are necessarily absent from the group of ball-room dances known generically as jazz, which, but for a few exceptions where the artist seems to have taken a hand, convey the impression of having been crudely borrowed and divorced from their elemental purpose without having undergone the moulding process, either of natural transition from soil to dance hall, or of artistic adaptation.

In this country, where the folk themselves first evolved the social dance from the earlier traditional dance, and where the seventeenth-century dancing-master seems to have been an artist, we are fortunate

enough to possess ball-room dances of a folk origin in which the period of traditional transition and that of artistic adaptation seem to have followed one another in natural sequence. The reflection occurs that if the original ritual dance, from which first the maypole dance and then the country dance were evolved, can end as a work of art in the ball-room, why should not the same original dance forms be diverted slightly in order to lead to a work of art on the stage? This survey, dealing with the past of the dance, cannot appropriately speculate as to its future. But just as, after travelling with strangers on a long and eventful journey, we do not like to part with them without learning something of their future movements, so it may not be altogether out of place here to glance at the possible next stage of the traditional dance that we have followed from the palæolithic cave to the modern ball-room.

Here we go round—why should not the next round bring us to the spectacular dance? Hitherto, in this country, the ballet has been an isolated creation, often a very attractive creation, springing directly from the brain of the ballet-master and the theatrical manager. But it cannot be said as a rule to express either historic tradition or the culture of modern life; and though the Russian ballet has made what is in many respects a fine break with the Continental ballet convention,



we have continued on the whole to borrow from the Italian. Cecil Sharp suggests somewhere, 'though with some diffidence', that 'the better way to bring about the reform, and perhaps the line of least resistance, is not to attempt an amendment of the existing ballet, but to revert to first principles, to start afresh and endeavour to create a ballet founded upon one or other of our folk dance techniques', the English technique being peculiarly adapted, in variety of steps and figures, for the purpose.

Dr R. R. Marett, in his interesting study of psychology and folk-lore, mentions the discovery made by educated people that one method of acquiring insight into the nature of folk dances, songs and dramas 'was actually to take a hand in them—to dance, sing and act them as the case may be'. His theory would be supported by hundreds of those who to-day are dancing folk dances as an art and a recreation, especially those who dance the older morris and sword dances. Our survey of the dance is concerned, not with art, but with tradition; and only as a matter of future history, therefore, are we justified in concluding with a speculation that from among the folk dancers of to-day there may eventually arise a group of creative artists who, possessing a knowledge of the technique of our racial dance, as well as that insight into its nature of which Dr Marett

speaks, will be qualified to carry on its tradition to another stage, that of the spectacular dance.

So here we come round again to the ballet dancers of the Egyptian tombs, and beyond them to the palæolithic cave-dwellers. We end, as we began, in a circle that spells eternity. Across the centuries we stretch our hands from the folk dancers of to-day, who leap for the joy of life that is in them, to those primitive dancers who, at the dawn of the world, leapt for the preservation of that same life spirit, which, like our story, knows no beginning and no end.



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